



Talk for Writing Home-school booklet

Doors – the world of possibility

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★ Activity 6: Comprehension

Read this extract from *The Snow-Walker's Son* by Catherine Fisher. You can listen to the extract here [See separate document called link to extract](#) 0hpt715

The door was the last one in the corridor.

As the flames flickered over it, they showed it was barred; a hefty iron chain hung across it, and the mud floor beneath was red with rust that had flaked off in the long years of locking and unlocking.

The keeper hung his lantern on a nail, took the key from a dirty string around his neck, and fitted it into the keyhole. Then he looked behind him.

'Get on with it!' the big man growled. 'Let me see what she keeps in there!'

The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it. With both hands he turned the key, then tugged out the red chain in a shower of rust and pushed the door. It opened, just a fraction. Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.

He stepped well back, handed the stranger the lantern, and jerked his head. He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.

The stranger hesitated; a draught moved his hair and he gazed back up the stone passageway as if he longed suddenly for warmth and light. And from what I've heard, the keeper thought, you won't be seeing much of those ever again.

Then the man held up the lantern and pushed the door. The keeper watched his face intently in the red glow, and his great hand, as it clutched a luck-stone that swung at his neck. The man went in, slowly. The door closed.

© Catherine Fisher 2011 from *The Snow Walker's Son*, published by Red Fox, by permission of the author.

1. ***The door was the last one in the corridor.***

What is the significance of the word *last*? Can you think of another context where the word *last* has a significant meaning? e.g. *the last chance*.

2. How do the opening lines (highlighted above) set the mood of the story?

What are your immediate impressions?

3. Having spent a great deal of time reflecting on the significance of doors and their appearance, what does this description suggest to you?

4. Why has Fisher described the iron chain as being 'hefty'? What could the significance of this word be in the context of the story?

5. ***Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.***

How does this make you feel as a reader? What is the relevance of both darkness and a damp smell? Do either of these surprise you; if so, why?

Activity 7: Grammar & Sentence Work

a. Pattern of three:

Fisher uses the **pattern of three** actions in a sentence to advance the action and inject a sense of pace into her writing. This helps to balance description, action and dialogue. e.g.

- The keeper **hung** his lantern on a nail, **took** the key from a dirty string around his neck, and **fitted** it into the keyhole.
- With both hands he **turned** the key, then **tugged** out the red chain in a shower of rust and **pushed** the door.
- He **stepped** well back, **handed** the stranger the lantern, and **jerked** his head.

★ Can you come up with three of your own sentences using this skill?

b. Semicolon for independent clauses

A semicolon can be used between independent clauses that are closely related in theme. In the following sentences, Catherine Fisher chooses to use semicolons in both of these sentences rather than using a joining word (conjunction) like *because*.

- The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it.
- He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.

★ In your opinion, why has she made this choice and what impact does it have on you as the reader?

★ Can you write two or three sentences of your own that illustrate the power of the semicolon over the use of a conjunction?

c. Adverbs – roving reporters

In the sentences below, the adverb 'slowly' is used to describe how the man enters the room. Adverbs are like roving reporters – they can be moved around the sentence, e.g.

- a. The man went in, slowly
- b. Slowly, the man went in.
- c. The man went slowly in.
- d. The man slowly went in.



By changing the position of the adverb, we can often either alter the meaning or add emphasis to a sentence. In this instance, by placing the *slowly* at the end, we infer that the character has a heightened awareness of the situation they are in and therefore deliberately enters with caution.

★ Try playing around with the adverb position in the following sentences. Consider how it alters the meaning and where the emphasis is best placed.

1. Cautiously, Samantha crept towards the door that stood before her.
2. Sadly, the boy stared out of the window.

★ Now try this out with a sentence of your own.

Activity 8: Through the eyes of a character



One of the things I love exploring when I'm writing is what must be going on in a character's mind. Whenever I read great portal stories, I always try to put myself into the shoes of the character, to try to imagine how they must be feeling as they discover this passageway to a new world. How must Alice have been feeling as she fell through the never-ending tunnel into Wonderland?

First, think of your character – it's easier if you base this on someone you know.

- What are they called?
- What do they look like?
- What sort of a person are they (miserable/friendly/kind/aggressive)?
- What do they say?
- What do they do?
- How do they treat other people?
- How do other people treat them?

Now compose a short piece of descriptive writing based on seeing a mysterious door through the eyes of your character. To do this, we will use a simple opener to drop the reader straight into the action:

Samantha stared. ...

Ali hesitated. ...

We will also try to use some of the tools we explored in *The Snow Walker's Son*. Look at this example:

Samantha stared. There, rising out of the cliff, was an unfamiliar door; its metallic panels were tarnished in rust. Paint flaked off the brittle walls that made up its frame and the door handle rattled in the bitter breeze. Slowly, Samantha gazed all around her, took a deep breath and stepped forward.

Here are the tools I used:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the setting through the eyes of the main character (MC) 	Samantha stared.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the door/portal. (You may like to use two sentences that are closely linked in meaning and connect them with a semicolon.) 	There, rising out of the cliff, was an unfamiliar door; its metallic panels were tarnished in rust.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add some more detail. 	Paint flaked off the brittle walls that made up its frame and the door handle rattled in the bitter breeze.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an adverb to hint at how the MC feels. Remember, you can move the position within the sentence. 	Slowly,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the pattern of three to advance the action and inject a sense of pace into your writing. 	Samantha gazed all around her, took a deep breath and stepped forward.



★ Now Imagine your main character is walking along the road when they come across a mysterious doorway. Describe this through their eyes. Use my model above to help you.

Session 9: Planning a portal story

Nearly all portal stories follow a similar pattern:

• Main character (MC) finds magical portal & enters new world
• Describe new world
• MC explores this new world & encounters a problem
• MC has to escape & return through the portal
• MC cannot find portal again (sometimes brings back a memento of new world)

Once you have identified the pattern of the story, the possibilities are endless. Let your imagination run free. Brainstorm lots of ideas and then decide which captures your interest as a writer. Before you start, take a look at my top tips.

Top tips for story writing:

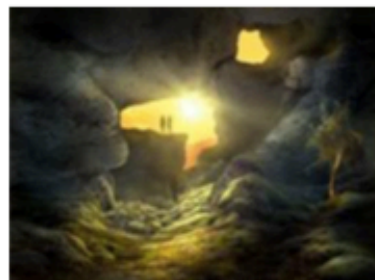
- **Start in a world/a setting that you know well** – it is far easier to describe something familiar to you, e.g. a garden, your school, your local town, etc.
- **Use a stimulus (e.g. picture) for the new world** – an image will help you focus in on the detail and describe what is there.
- **Let your ideas flow** – don't worry about spelling, handwriting or presentation ... you can go back and edit this later.

Here are a couple of ideas to open your mind to the world of possibility:

Underlying Pattern	Story idea 1	Story idea 2
Main character (MC) finds magical portal and enters new world	Elif is playing in her Grandmother's garden and notices a small fairy door. Touches door and shrinks/ enters.	Josh and Archie playing hide and seek in their house. Archie opens hatch in the roof and discovers new world.

Describe new world	Arrives in an underground world full of caves, giant toadstools and magical creatures.	Transported to life onboard an enormous sailing ship in Tudor England.
MC explores new world and encounters a problem	Elif explores new world and enters an area strictly forbidden. Picks magical flower.	Ship is thrown into battle.
MC has to escape and return through the portal	Alarms sound and Elif runs. She is chased through the magical world by unknown threat and escapes.	Archie desperately searches for portal and way back to own world.
MC cannot find portal again (sometimes has brought back a memento of new world)	Elif cannot find fairy door again, but the cut flower lives on forever reminding her of her journey.	Archie escapes with small pouch of gunpowder in his pocket.

★ Using this underlying pattern, plan a few portal stories of your own. You may like to draw upon your own personal experience as well as your wider reading and imagination. I have also included two pictures in case they help you.



Session 10: Writing your own story

You now have all of the tools required to write your own portal story. You may like to write about a more traditional portal that leads you to a magical world, or you may prefer to draw upon your personal experiences, as we have explored throughout this unit.

To recap on all the key points we've been learning:

- a. **Describe the portal in detail.** You may want to show the portal through the eyes of the main character.
- b. **Think about what lies on the other side of the door.** Allow yourself the opportunity to write about what interests you and what is important to you.
- c. **Great writers steal ideas ('maggie') from other great writers.** Reflect upon the portal stories that you have loved reading and consider what made these so engaging. Try to bring in some of these skills and techniques into your own work.
- d. **Enjoy it.** Writing is all about sharing a passion for words, stories and the world of possibility. If you love the story you are writing – so too will your reader.

★ **Now write your portal story, drawing on all that you have learned. Don't forget to share or publish your work – great writing deserves an audience!**

